Devastation of Forests due to Fire

1684. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether vast areas of thick forests in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and other States have been ravaged and devastated by forest fires over the years;

(b) if so, the extent and areas of such forests at present; and

(c) the plans and strategy drawn out for restoration of such forests?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) The fires in the forest areas occur frequently during the dry season of the year and are of the nature of ground fires only. As such these fires do not cause devastation or ravaging of forests. In Hill States like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh incidences of forest fire mostly occur in the Pine forest areas where dry Pine needles burn. Even such fires do not cause devastation or ravaging of forests.

(c) The State Forest Departments take preventive measures for warding off such fires by creating fire lines and generating awareness among the people about the fire hazards. In most States local people are involved through the Joint Forest Management Committees for prevention and control of incidences of forest fire. The Government of India under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes also provide financial assistance to States for forest fire control and management. As there being no devastation of forests, restoration works are not required to be planned. However, regeneration of younger crop is supplemented during rainy season.

Biosphere reserves

1685. SHRIMATI VIPLOVE THAKUR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a number of potential sites are under consideration of Government for declaring as biosphere reserves;

(b) if so, their names, location-wise;

(c) by when these sites are likely to be sanctioned;

(d) whether, after declaring these sites as biosphere reserves, the fragile Himalayan environment region could be protected from hazardous activities occurring/likely to occur in the region; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) Cold Desert biosphere reserve in Himachal Pradesh and Sheshachalam biosphere reserve in Andhra Pradesh are the sites identified for designation as biosphere reserves.

(c) After receipt of the consent and project documents containing delineation of areas for these biosphere reserves from concerned State Governments, these sites can be considered for

designation as biosphere reserves and sanction of financial assistance.

(d) and (e) Declaration of sites as biosphere reserve in itself would not protect the fragile Himalayan environment region from hazardous activities occurring/likely to occur in the region.

Storage facilities for food processing

1686. SHRI BALBIR PUNJ: Will the Minister of FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that about 40 per cent of farm produce in the country is wasted due to inappropriate storage, lack of primary processing facilities and inefficient procurement and if so, the steps Government is taking to stop this huge wastage;

(b) whether it is also a fact that a country of the size of India has only 21.7 mt of cold storage facilities in operation, while it needs at least 9-10 mt more of the capacity; and

(c) if so, the action plan of Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES (SHRI SUBODH KANT SAHAY): (a) to (c) It is estimated that the processing level in the food processing sector has gone up from 6% to 10 % and value addition has gone up from 20% to 26% during last five years. The level of wastage of agricultural food items is estimated to be about Rs, 50,000/- crores occurring at various stages of handling after harvesting due to fragmented farming, lack of adequate post-harvest infrastructure such as lack of cold chain facilities, transportation, proper storage facilities etc.

In order to increase level of processing and to promote food processing industries to exploit both the domestic and international market potential for processed food products, Vision 2015 Document has been finalized by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MFPI), which envisages tripling the size of the processed food sector by increasing the level of processing of perishables from 6% to 20% value addition from 20% to 35% and share in global food trade from 1.5% to 3% by 2015. An integrated strategy for promotion of agribusiness-Vision, Strategy and Action Plan for the Food Processing Sector has also been approved by the Government. There has been increase in substantial rate of growth of the food processing industry from 7% in 2003-04 to 13 -14 % in 2006-07, which has contributed to reduction of wastages and better value addition.

To encourage setting up of cold chain facilities and backward linkages in the country, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MFPI) has a Plan Scheme for Cold Chain, Value Addition and Preservation Infrastructure during the 11th Plan to provide financial assistance to project proposals received from public / private organizations for cold chain infrastructure development. The scheme envisages financial assistance in the form of grant-in-aid @ 50% of the total cost of plant and